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ABSTRACT

Forty-six supervisors and teachers were surveyed regarding their attitudes toward integration of handicapped children in a regular preschool program, the helpfulness of supportive services, and the necessary conditions for the integration of their programs. Findings showed that the majority of teachers were in favor of integration and supportive services, but many were cautious about the practice of integration. Differences were also found toward integration and supportive services in relation to the individual teacher's experience in working with the handicapped. Significant consensus with the literature on the necessary conditions was found, with support services seen as the most crucial factor. (Author/PHR)

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Attitudes of Preschool Teachers Toward the Integration of Handicapped Children

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Abstract

Preschool teachers' attitudes and views were surveyed regarding the integration of handicapped children in a regular preschool program, the helpfulness of supportive services, and the necessary conditions for the integration of their programs. While the majority of the teachers were in favour of integration and supportive services, many were also cautious about the practice of integration. Differences were also found toward integration and supportive services in relation to the individual teacher's experience in working with the handicapped. Significant consensus with the literature was found on the necessary conditions listed by the surveyed teachers.

Attitudes of Preschool Teachers Toward the Integration of Handicapped Children

Integrating handicapped children into a regular school program, commonly referred to as mainstreaming, has been a major concern of the public and educators (Brenton, 1974 and Rausher, 1976). Following the trend in public schools, integration was extended downward to the preschool level. It was further reinforced in the U.S. by government regulations that 10% of enrollment in Head Start be handicapped children. Numerous integrated preschool programs have emerged in the past decade (Wynne, Ulfelder & Dakof, 1975).

"Handicapped" is employed here in its broadest sense to include children with physical, cognitive, social and emotional handicaps. Integrating the handicapped at the preschool level is important because research has demonstrated that (1) social integration is better achieved at a younger age (Billings, 1963 and Goodman, Gottlieb & Harrison, 1972) and (2) negative attitudes toward the physically handicapped appear to first emerge at about age five (Jones & Sisk, 1967). The preschool ages (4 to 5 years of age) are therefore suggested as the optimal time to foster the development of positive attitudes toward the handicapped (Levitt & Cohen, 1976). This view has been confirmed by the experiences of various integrated preschool programs (Grantham, 1971; Keyes, 1976 and Lewis, 1973). It appears, then, that integrated programs at the preschool level would constitute the basic step to mainstreaming handicapped individuals.

An essential variable that would affect the quality of an integrated program is teachers' attitudes. They are thought to be capable of influencing

the performance and self-perception of handicapped children in an integrated program (Wynne et al., 1975). Suggestions, therefore, have been made to carefully evaluate the teachers' attitudes before placement of a handicapped child into their classes (Cohen, 1975; Jones, Gottlieb, Guskin & Yoshida, 1978 and Valletutti, 1969). However, no studies have yet explored the attitudes of preschool teachers toward mainstreaming, although the attitudes of teachers at higher education levels are documented (Jordan and Proctor, 1969 and Shotel, Iano & McGettigan, 1972).

Other important variables for an integrated program are supportive services for the handicapped and instrumental conditions such as school facilities and teacher's competency. Supportive services, for example, were reported to effect significant achievement gains in students at all levels of intellectual functioning (Cantrell and Cantrell, 1976) and to benefit regular classroom teachers working with the handicapped (Edelmann, 1966). Those variables, too, have not been studied at the preschool level.

This study explored (1) the attitudes of preschool teachers toward the integration of handicapped children, (2) their attitudes toward supportive services to assist them with the handicapped, and (3) their views on the conditions necessary for an integrated program.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 46 supervisors and teachers from 44 preschools and daycare centers in a metropolitan Canadian city (total population 290,000). The districts where samples were taken, constituted the core metropolitan

area with a total population of 160,000. The preschools and daycare centers surveyed represented approximately 82% of those available for preschool children at the time of the study. Eighty-two percent of the participating teachers were working with at least one child whom they identified as handicapped in at least one area of development (Dyson & Dyson, in press).

Procedures

The supervisors and teachers took part in the survey after a telephone or personal interview. Only two of all facilities contacted failed to participate. Questionnaires dealing with various aspects of an integrated preschool program were distributed. Due to common usage within the community, the term "special needs" was interchanged with "handicapped". The questions pertinent to this report were as follows:

1. Are you in favour of including special needs children in your program? Yes _____ No _____ (Please check)

2. Would supportive services be helpful to you and those children with special needs or handicaps? Yes _____ No _____. If yes, what kind would be most beneficial to you: please check:
   One-to-one individual program _____
   Working with parents _____
   Consultation with teachers _____
   Others _____(please comment)

3. What are the conditions which would allow you to accept a handicapped child?

While the first two questions were presented to all participants in the study, only 29 schools were randomly selected to answer the last question.

Results

Attitudes Toward an Integrated Program

Table 1 summarizes the attitudes of preschool teachers toward an integrated program. Ninety-four percent of the surveyed supervisors and

teachers were in favour of including a handicapped child in their program. No participants voiced an objection but 6% did not respond to the question. However, only 81% of the surveyed teachers would accept a handicapped child into a regular preschool program without any reservations. Others (13%) spontaneously added that they would accept a handicapped child only with reservations. The nature of the reservations became evident in their response to the third question.

TABLE 1

Teachers' Attitudes Toward
Integrating Handicapped Children in
Their Own Program

Response	Number of Teachers (N=47)	Percent
In favour	44	93.6
Without reservations	38	80.8
With reservations	6	12.7
Against	0	0.0
No response	3	6.3

A difference was found between the attitudes of teachers who had had the experience of working with handicapped children and those who did not. Whereas only 76% of those having worked with handicapped children favoured an integrated program without reservation, all of those with no experience with handicapped children were in favour of integration without reservation.

The difference is significant (C.R. =8.00). Table 2 shows the difference in attitudes between teachers whose schools had had handicapped children and those whose schools did not.

TABLE 2

Difference in Preschool Teachers' Attitudes Toward Integration

N=47

Teachers	In favour		With reservations		No response		Against	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
From schools with special needs children (N=40)	31	76	6	15	3	7	0	0
From schools with no special needs children (N=7)	7	100	0	0	0	0	0	0

Attitudes Toward Supportive Services

Table 3 summarizes teachers' attitudes toward supportive services. As can be seen, a great majority of the surveyed teachers (91%) believed that a supportive service would be helpful for them in working with handicapped children. Only one teacher (2%) felt that such a service would not assist them and the handicapped children in their programs. The remainder failed to respond to the question.

TABLE 3

Teachers' Attitudes Toward
Supportive Services

Response	Number of Teachers (N=47)	Percent
In favour	43	91.4
Against	1	2.1
No response	3	6.3

However, contrary to their position toward integration, teachers who had had experience with special needs children were more in favour of supportive services than those without experience. This was clear when 95% of teachers from the schools enrolling special needs children were in favour of supportive services whereas only 71% of those from preschools without handicapped children expressed their support for such a service. The difference is again significant (C.R. 2.18, P<.03). Table 4 presents the differences in teachers' attitudes toward supportive services.

TABLE 4

Differences in Teachers' Attitudes
Toward Supportive Services

	In favour		Against		No response	
Teachers	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
From preschools with special needs children	(N=40) 38	95	1	2	1	2
From preschools without special needs children	(N=7) 5	71	0	0	2	(N=7) 28

Little difference of opinion emerged regarding preference for a specific type of supportive service from among those suggested in the question. A very slight preference was found for working with parents, and, consultation with teachers (24 teachers favoured working with parents, 22 consultation with teachers and 20 one-to-one individualized programs).

Necessary Conditions for an Integrated Program

A total of seven conditions was identified by the surveyed preschool teachers and supervisors as necessary for the integration of handicapped children. Table 5 presents those conditions along with the number and proportion of teachers in each condition.

TABLE 5

Teachers' Prerequisites for
Integrating Handicapped Children in
Their Own Program

Prerequisite	Number of Teachers (N=29)	Percent
1. Back-up supportive services from mental health or health professionals	19	65.5
2. Additional personnel	18	62.1
3. Further training in special education	13	44.8
4. More financial support	11	37.9
5. Nature and severity of the handicap	11	37.9
6. Better facilities	6	20.7
7. Approval of parent group	3	10.3

As seen in Table 5, most teachers (66%) listed the back-up support or supportive services of health and mental health professionals as a necessary condition for accepting handicapped children into their programs. Equally important was extra personnel to assist in the class where a handicapped child is present. Sixty-two percent of the teachers expressed such a need. Related to this issue is the need for additional financial support for the preschool or daycare center with handicapped children, perceived by 38% of the respondents. Extra finances would be for additional staff, improving the pay of teachers or for special equipment for the physically handicapped.

Further training for teachers in special education was listed by 45% of the respondents as another important condition for accepting a handicapped child into a regular program.

The nature of the handicap would also determine the acceptance of a handicapped child into a regular program, indicated by 38% of the surveyed supervisors and teachers. Some would hesitate to accept a child with a severe physical or mental handicap while others would not consider a child with behavioural problems. A behavioural problem was seen as potentially disruptive of the class while a lack of appropriate physical facilities, personnel or skills in teachers were cited as the reasons for rejecting the severely handicapped.

Other conditions listed for the acceptance of a handicapped child included appropriate physical facilities and approval from the parent group of a cooperative preschool.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that while most preschool supervisors and teachers favoured an integrated preschool program in principle, they were also cautious about the practice. This cautiousness was reflected by the significant proportion of those who expressed their reservations on accepting a handicapped child into their own program even though they supported the concept of integration.

The study also found differential teachers' attitudes toward integration and support services in relation to personal experience with the handicapped. Those with experience were more reserved toward integration and felt a greater need for support services. Other researchers (Jordan et al., 1969 and Jacobs, 1974) found a similar attitude in teachers toward integration in association with their experience with handicapped children.

As the principal operator of the program, preschool teachers can best identify the instrumental conditions needed for an integrated program. For the surveyed teachers, support services to assist with the handicapped were the most crucial factor. This was followed by extra personnel, further special education training for teachers, increased financial assistance, the degree and nature of a handicap, better facilities and, finally, approval from the parent group. Many of these conditions coincided with those summarized by reviewers of integrated programs (Wynne et al., 1975).

An interesting finding of the study is the importance the teachers placed on the nature and degree of a handicap for an integrated program. Another study also found differential teachers' attitudes toward different types of disabilities (Shotel et al., 1972). A common finding in both studies is a less favourable attitude of teachers toward behavioural problems.

The concern of the surveyed teachers suggests that a certain type and degree of handicap may be beyond what a regular preschool setting is ready to accept. The need for support services would appear even greater for those regular preschools enrolling children with behavioural problems.

Conclusion

This study provided an exploratory investigation into preschool teachers' attitudes toward different aspects of an integrated preschool program. The consistency of the findings with those reported in the literature suggests that the attitudes and views of the surveyed teachers may well represent others' elsewhere. As the teachers ultimately determine the value of a program, the present findings have wide implications for public services, agencies and teacher training programs that are concerned with handicapped children.

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